2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



241 If a trunk is too wide to be swarmed, a narrow pole is cut from the surrounding bush and slanted up against it, or the climber may choose to swing by his arms like a monkey from a convenient bough in a neighbouring tree.

241 412 [326] 313 All Bemba are exceedingly neat and deft with an axe (*isembe*).[1] Each axe-head is fixed at an angle of about 45° through a slit drilled with red-hot iron in a knobbed holder (*umupini*) about 2 feet long. A man never parts with his axe. He carries it everywhere with him swung over his shoulder as he walks.[2] At the beginning of each tree-cutting season the axe-blades are reforged by native smiths, who heat the iron white-hot in a charcoal fire blown with skin bellows, and hammer it out to a new fine cutting edge. During a morning's work the axes are constantly rubbed on stones, often between the cutting of each tree. The blade is thus kept very sharp, and when the shaft is held at the right angle, it will sever a branch from the trunk with two or three deft slashes from alternate sides. I have seen a man clear a good-sized tree of branches in ten minutes in this way, and at the tree-cutting season the bush resounds with the blows of axes and the splintering of wood. Heavy boughs crash as they fall through the undergrowth beneath. At the top of the tree the work becomes more and more dangerous. A man may be left standing on a fork at the summit with one of the vertical stems as yet uncut. He has to clasp it with one hand to steady himself, while with the other he slashes at the trunk he is clinging to. He swings his axe till he hears the warning crack and feels the branch sway. Then he slides his body quick as a flash down the mutilated stump of the tree, yelling in triumph as he hears the bough fall.

241 Every year two or three deaths occur during the tree-cutting. Other men are disabled through falls. The Bemba recognize the work as dangerous, and we have seen that they delay the clearing of the bush until their strength is at its maximum (p. 50); until they have recovered from the effects of a beer-drink (p. 18); or until the weather is warm so that their hands do not slip on the axe-handle.

[326] [1] Axe-heads appear to have been among the few implements which the Bemba smiths knew how to forge. Most axes are still made by native smiths, although more often than not, with European iron, stolen or bought. Only a few are bought at the stores.

[2] As a proverb illustrating parental affection the Bemba say, 'A child is like a little axe. If it hurts you, you just throw it over your shoulder.' *Mwana, isembe. Nelyo kakukoma, nakakobeka na pa kubea.*